Caste System in India and Role of Education

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Abstract

It is well known that the traditional Indian society based on a caste hierarchy breads inequality. It is a pervasive feature of human society. Generally these inequalities were reflected in caste and varna. Varna and jati are two distinct concepts. Varna is usually a unification of all the Hindu castes or jatis into four groups: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and shudra. Jati is an endogamous group. In more advanced and modern societies, inequalities amongst people become more obvious since these are determined by other factors like wealth, race gender class and caste etc. Varnas are according to division of labour, work, while jati is by birth.

Introduction:

It is well known that the traditional Indian society based on a caste hierarchy breads inequality. It is a pervasive feature of human society. Generally these inequalities were reflected in caste and varna. Varna and jati are two distinct concepts. Varna is usually a unification of all the Hindu castes or jatis into four groups: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and shudra. Jati is an endogamous group. In more advanced and modern societies, inequalities amongst people become more obvious since these are determined by other factors like wealth, race gender class and caste etc. Varnas are according to division of labour, work, while jati is by birth.

In India caste is important basis on social categorization. Here both caste and class are used as basis of hierarchical ranking and exist side by side. However caste which is rooted in religious belief is considered a more important basis of social stratification for social economic and religious purposes. It is hereditarily social group which does not permit social mobility to its member. It involves ranking according to birth which affects one's occupation, marriage and social relationship. It is infact an inseparable element of society.

Caste:

The word caste is used in everyday life to distinguish one person from another. We say that such a person belongs to a particular caste. In saying it we generally mean to convey that he is born of parents or is a member of family said to belong to a particular caste. Castes are ranked, endogamous groups, membership in which is achieved by birth. There are thousands of caste and subcaste in India. If we think about caste without prejudging the issue we must recognize the term is not an Indian one that we need several terms to distinguish various kinds of collectivises or units to which the term caste has been applied. In original form caste belongs to Portuguese by whom it was ordinarily used among themselves to express caste, mould, race, kind and quality. In

Portuguese, caste means race, lineage or pure stock. This term is derived from the Latin 'castus' which has a range of meanings from morally pure distinguished to unpolluted, Indian have a variety of terms or referring to units in their social system. the two main are being varna and jati. Caste can be defined so that it is applicable only to India, just as it is possible to define narrowly almost any socio-cultural phenomenon. Caste has always been a powerful potential and actual weapon in keeping the people divided and weak in the face of challenge. **(B. Kuppuswamy, 1986).** Each caste has its own system of rewards, taboos, prescriptions and occupation and the members are obliged by mores to remain in their ascribed status and perform their ascribed roles. Caste is presumably unchangeable from birth and according to Indian religious nation of reincarnation only through re-birth can one enter a higher caste. Castes are endogamous and no one can marry outside his caste or sub-caste. **(Gerald D. Berreman, 1979).**

Spirit of Caste:

When we say that the spirit of caste reign in a society, we mean that the different groups of which that society is composed, repel each other rather than attract, that each retires within itself isolate itself makes every efforts to prevent it members from contracting alliances or even from entering into relations with neighbouring groups. A man refuses to seek a wife outside his traditional circle. He will moreover refuse any food not prepared by his fellows and regard the mere contact of strangers an impure and degrading. Such is the man who obeys the spirit of caste. Horror of misalliance, fear of contacts and repulsion for all those who are unrelated

such are the characteristics sign of this spirit. It seems to us that it is as if were designed to atomize the societies into which it penetrates, it divides them not merely super imposed level but into multitude of opposed fragment, it brings each of their elementary group face to face, separated by mutual repulsion. **(Andre Beteille,. 1983)**

The spirit of caste unites these three tendencies repulsion, hierarchy and hereditary specialization and all three must be borne in mind if one wishes to give a complete definition of the caste system. We shall say that a society is subject to this system. If it is divided into a large number of mutually opposed groups which are hereditarily specialized and hierarchically arranged, if a principle it tolerates neither the parvenu nor misgeneration, nor a change of profession. **(, Andre Beteille 1965)**

Caste as a Unit as a System:

It can also be looked upon as a structural phenomenon as well as cultural phenomenon. As a unit caste can be defined as a closed status group, means that is a group in which the status of the members, their occupation, the field of male selection and interaction with other is fixed. As a system, it refers to interrelated statuses and pattern restriction and change of membership, occupation, marriage and commensal relation. As a cultural phenomenon, caste may be viewed as set of values, beliefs and practices**. (Ram Ahuja, 1999)**

Caste System:

A caste system is a type of social structure which divides people on the basis of inherited social status. Although many societies could be described in this way,

within a caste system people are rigidly expected to marry and interact with people of same social class. India has a well known example of a caste system, although various forms of caste system can be found in many other cultures as well. **(Dy. Celestin Bougle, 1971).** Several characteristic distinguish a caste system. The first is the tendency towards endogamy, meaning that people marry within the same caste exclusively. Caste mobility is also extremely rare, one cannot transform a labourer to a scholar except in very rare circumstances, within a caste system, each member generally knows his or her place and your social status is usually apparently to others as well. It has also unique features among which are its religious aspect, its complexity and the degree to which the caste is cohesive group that regulates the behaviour of its members, within India there is considerable variation in the characteristics of and the relation among the groups to which the term caste is applied. These castes are traditionally associated with an occupation, such as high ranking Brahmans, middle ranking Farmer and artisan groups, such as potters, barbers and carpenters and very low ranking untouchable leather workers, butchers, launderers and latrine cleaner. **(Ram Ahuja, 1999)**

Present Scenario:

After independence according to the government policy there is separation between religion and state. Practicing untouchability or discriminating a person based on his caste is legally forbidden. The Indian have also become more flexible in their caste system customs. In general the urban people in India are less strict about the caste system than the rural. In cities one can see different caste people mingling with each other while in some rural areas there is still discrimination based on castes and sometimes also on untouchability. Sometimes in villages or in the cities there are violent clashes which are connected to caste tensions. Sometimes the high castes strike the lower castes who dare to uplift their status. **(B. Kuppuswamy, 1986).**

The caste identity has become a subject of political, social and legal interpretation. Communities who get listed as entitled for positive discrimination do not get out of this list even if their social and political conditions get better.

There are many central government policies which have a positive discrimination about the castes. But with all this positive discrimination policy, most of the communities who were low in caste hierarchy remain low in the social order even today, and communities who were high in the social hierarchy remain even today high in the social hierarchy. Most of the degrading jobs are even today done by the Dalit, While the Brahmans at the top of hierarchy. **(Surindro Mohun Tagore 1963).**

Despite many problems, the caste system has operated successfully for centuries, providing goods and services to India's many millions of citizens. The system continues to operate but changes are occurring. India's constitution guarantees basic rights to all its citizens, including the right to equality and equal protection before the law. The practice of untouchability, as well as discrimination on the basis of caste, race, sex or religion has been legally abolished. All citizens have the right to vote and political competition is lively. Voters from every

stratum of society have formed, interest groups, overlapping and cross cutting castes, creating an evolving new style of integrating Indian society.

Role of Education:

For centuries the rigid caste system in India has opposed intercaste marriage. After independence Indian society change a lot and is being changing continuously. From general to upper class cannot be free from its effects. Previously not all the citizens got education and education was not popular and modern, scientific and transportation were not so advanced. Indian society was suffering from rituals like Child Marriage, Caste System, Parda Pratha, but after independence our society is changing very fast. Infact ritualistic thoughts slowed down these changes a lot, then also new thinking have overcome that. Today our country is progressing learning behind the old thinking. Whereas previously people hesitate to eat together with another caste. Today in every caste they are living together and cooperate with, almost everywhere in schools offices and other social activities.

Under the influence of widespread education person in urban areas appear to be seeking greater freedom and independence to express them and to make their own decision. They are more in favour of intercaste marriage. Inter caste marriages have received acceptance from the people in urban and modern societies. Now there has been a wide change in the present social scenario

Education has given them this acceptance and status in society. They are broadminded individuals and their social circle is also of similar educated broadminded people who do not judge a person depending on his caste rather on their individual & traits qualities. Education is the chief factor in changing the mind set of people & society at large. Due to education their minds could break the stereotyped notions about caste & class and helped them to understand an individual and accept him /her & this led to these intercaste alliances. Education has not only brought about changes in the attitudes, beliefs, values and ideologies of the people but has also created and aroused individualistic feelings

Conclusion:

India is still more or less a traditional society with rigid caste and religious system. It is quite heartening to note that the force of the caste in marriage selection is gradually loosening over time. This is a good beginning to completely eradicate the caste system in India. Intercaste marriages are one of the means of eradicating the caste barrier in India, whether urban or rural.

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